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NINEVEH.

A PRIZE POEM

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CITED IN THE THEATRE, OXFORD,

JULY III. M DCCC LI.

BY

ALFRED WILLIAM HUNT.

SCHOLAR OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE.



OXFORD:

FRANCIS MACPHERSON.

M DCCC LI.



NINEVEH.

IT is the hour, when thousand gorgeous hues
Rose-flushed and golden all the west suf-
fuse ;

It is the hour, when o'er the desert air
Peals the soft chant which calls to evening prayer ;
Chiming from every far-off minaret
Like spirit-voices when the sun hath set.
Far on the level waste, encircled round
By day's last splendours—one mysterious mound,
One long, low range, with solitary cone,
Breaks with dark edge, that amber-gleaming zone.
'Tis but a shapeless mass, yet something there
Tells a wild tale of ruin and despair.
'Tis fringed with flowers, and yet the hues of death,
Peep through the tresses of its vernal wreath.
Those deep dusk lines—those characters of flame—
Scarring its slope, no vulgar earth proclaim.

o "

Than the freaked flowers that rou
twine ?

Or canst thou read, where yonder
Those arrow-angled words thick-
clay ?

And do no memories in that wi
Hath Fancy never with her witch
Hallowed the spot ? the Arab lin
At fall of eve, feels he no secret f
Spite of himself, upon his spirit p
In the hushed desert's glimmering
What time the muffled roar of Ti
Marks where a thousand murmur
O'er weir foam-white (athwart th
By giant hands while yet this wo
There oft in moonlight-haze. the

The nomad hears imprisoned spirits' wail
Inform the sighings of the midnight gale ;
And thinks of demon powers by Allah's doom
For ever pent within that caverned tomb.
Or when Orion flames along the sky,
'Tis Nimrod's restless shade, careering high
O'er the weird realms his earthly sceptre swayed
In star-embroidered robe and glittering belt arrayed.
And wild fantastic tales of earth's first prime
Of patriarch virtue and Titanic crime
Told by the embers' glow of reddening light
Beguile the starlit watches of the night—
But aught beyond tradition's oral tale
Or gleams of truth, like wavering sunlights pale,
The Arab knows not, though around him rise
The sepulchres of earth's first monarchies ;
Nor ever dreams, his camel's tinkling tread
Falls on some silent City of the Dead !
For know—that circle o'er whose desert ring
Those shapeless mounds their darkening shadows fling,
That desolation—far as eye can see
Forlorn and lifeless—once was NINEVEH.

Dread shades of Ninus and Semiramis
Were these your realms—your empire city this ?
And thou, the Assyrian's glory ! peerless queen
Of yet unrifled worlds ! was this the scene

glow

swimming haze enfolds that was
h, fearful witness of a doom divin
or earth once knew no splendour
The spirit of eld is on me, as I sit
n Zagros' brow, three thousand y
their mythic glories, and the days
when all was life—all joy—all bea
Oh gorgeous vision! when this s
rippled in golden seas of ripening
when the far-ranging eye enraptur
the citted wilderness, one peopled
the maze of spire, and pinnacle an
markling along the dimmed horiz
temples were there, on piled-up m
whose eaves with gold, whose wal

There sheeny fountains danced, there hung on high
The terraced garden's leafy tracery :
And many a dreamy paradise between
Peeped 'mid the glare, calm isles of dewy green.
Around, in range illimitable shone,
Vast walls and battlements, nor yet of stone,
Bastions and pyramids of clay, which gleamed
Like rocks of jasper, when the sunblaze streamed
O'er their far summits, glittering broad and high
Line above line, against a sapphire sky.

And flowing round two sides, a lordly tide
Reflected silken-sailed flotillas' pride.
And quays beheld with richest hand unrolled
The wealth of Ind, and Ophir's ruddy gold.
Earth's tribute-offerings, over land and sea,
Bright Queen of Cities, found their way to thee!
For thee the "Desert-ship" high-laden came
Through moving sands, and reddening spires of flame,
Bearing rare gems, and pearls and corals gay
And bales of rustling silks from far Cathay,
To deck thy crimson-clothed bazaars, and feed
Wealth's pampered pride and languid luxury's need.

'Twas then God looked from heaven—in all thy
round

Not one pure soul—one righteous man was found.
But while the' avenging angel lingering still

All day through myriad-haunted
The voice of fate—the messenger
Yet forty days! resounds the star
Yet forty days! and Ninevéh shall
A desolation!—forty days are giv
To meet the judgment of offended
At once those myriads felt the free
The thronged bazaar, the joyous d
So wildly—fearfully—those accen
God's spirit speaking from a huma
Onward—still on—till those drear
A golden court and sapphire-vaul
Where amid swarthy warriors' flas
And white-stoled Magians, sate the
Monarch of millions! see before h
That pilgrim-prophet, and with ou

Swelled up to heaven a city's anguished cry ;
Incense of sorrow, gladdening all the sky—
The Almighty heard that many-voiced prayer,
From morn till even fill the murmurous air,
And checked His lightnings.

But alas, too soon
Returning sin annulled the precious boon—
In vain destruction's stretched-out arm was stayed :
Thine hour of judgment might not be delayed.

As oft, when stormy-lingering sunsets throw
Deep-mirrored gleams o'er ocean-waves below,
Empurpled cloud and burnished sea and sky
Prolong those lurid glories ere they die ;
So lost in mythic tale and centuries' gloom
The last, dire moment which fulfilled thy doom.

Say did'st thou perish then, when round thee poured
Chaldæa's swarms and Media's rebel horde ?
When roused from silken-veiled seraglios,
And life-long dream of luxury's lulled repose,
The last of Nimrod's line, beheld afar
The horizon black with tempest-gathering war.
Fear not, he cried, till yonder rippling river
These brazen gates and bastioned cliffs shall sever !
Fear not, to-night in our ancestral hall
Princes, we keep joy's maddest festival !

NINEVEH.

forth that night, for heaven their
aled,
len Tigris foams—the ramparts y
quet hall is now their battle-field.
is lost—and will that monarch die
e lived and reigned—ingloriously
yon vast terrace looms in misty
s rising, gorgeous rich and rare :
afar along the nightly sky
ent, gold, and jewelled marquetry
y a Tyrian vesture's purple wreat
sultan's flaming couch of death.
he glow that crimsoned o'er the s
life, and empire swelled that awfu
st thou rise from ashes, once agai

Moaned with the floating echoes of despair.

And then, O dreary blank—thy glory's theme
Sounded, to later worlds, a glittering dream.
And these were all that time had not effaced,
Stern, gloomy mounds that broke a gloomier waste.

Here the ten thousand, as they hasten by,
Gaze long and thoughtfully, with wondering eye :
They talk of perished cities—and anon
Passes a youthful conqueror, speeding on
To grasp the gorgeous Orient's dazzling crown ;
And hosts are thronging 'neath their lonely frown ;
Here bannered armies met, nor thought their blood
Crimsoned the sands where once a city stood.
The tides of time swept past, and voiceless still
Rose from the sunburnt moor each scorched hill,
And knew no change upon its hoary crest,
Save when with flowery coronal 'twas drest,
Or swept by winter's rains—the world grew old,
And still that city slept, unsought, unknown, untold.

At last, 'twas thus the Moslem version ran,
A bright-eyed stranger came from Frangistan :
Master of mightiest spells—and vaster far
Than wizard aisles of pillared Chilminar
Cities arose—enchanted halls revealed
Treasures untold by primal kings concealed :

1
r sleeping centuries o'er its glories f
That sudden day unbinds the viewles
nd bids life's stream rush through ea
o ! where yon fleeting sunbeam faint
hat thronging shapes its alien light
hat fearful forms, in twilight horror
amp with cleft hoof, and lour with b
e, the pale marble, broadly-shadowe
ith wild, colossal, mockeries of life !
s but the sport of time hath flashed i
our world's noonday on millennial
d bids us here the dim memorials sc
ages past ere history's world began.
Here now, when evening shades the
at millions, Fancy, waken at thy ca
at aëry forms at thine enchantress v

Winding through aisles with rainbow-hues inlaid
Yet dimmed with demon-gods' tremendous shade :
While thousand cresset-lamps, with phosphor-glow
Pour silver floods o'er polished walls below,
Where bathed in light, emblazoned warriors rear
The flame-like sword—the lightning of the spear :
There sculptured battle glows, there cities fall,
And chariots thunder round the frescoed hall :
Here moves an imaged king, tiara-crowned
With long, fringed vesture sweeping to the ground,
With waving tressèd hair, and star-gemmed zone,
And rich embroidery o'er his shoulders thrown :
Heaven's constant majesty, with plume outspread
In mystic ring floats hovering o'er his head.
There in the angle, with its pearl-dropt leaves,
The sacred tree its fretted foliage weaves :
On either side, a broad-winged figure brings
In woven basket, hallowed offerings,
Fir-cones and flowers—two eagle-headed shapes
Grisly and grim. But where the portal gapes
Approach and tremble—there on either hand
Mysterious signs, unwearied warders stand,
Huge lion-forms, frowning a tawny red,
With regal height majestic—human head,
And eagle-wings thrown back, of every hue
Vermilion-feathered, gold and jet and blue,

NINEVEH.

pavement. Tremble, thou art
changed of changeless Deity!
those stern and hueless lips co
as once have owned the shudde
oved seers, what world-wide c

in horror, or bowed down in f
those nations? though the sunb
through palace courts or templ
in sacred calm, or restless stri
e full pulses of their mighty li
t now! those senseless gods al
frown in everlasting stone.

awful memory! since your day
ling wheels might almost own
hath conquest's crimson wing

When high-enthroned in empyrèan blaze,
Shall sit the Ancient of eternal days.
With glory-streaming hair, and robe of snow
Car-borne on fiery wheels' seraphic glow :
And judgment lingers not, the thrones are set—
The Book is opened—age with age is met.
He comes, to whom the Eternal God hath given
All power on earth, all majesty in heaven :
The heir of time and heaven's undying state,
The SON OF MAN to close that book of Fate.

THE END.



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